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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3663

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5820

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3528

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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001382

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; EEB;
ENERGY FOR EKIMOFF/BURPOE/COHEN
COMMERCE FOR EHOUSE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2019

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SUBJECT: TURKMEN PRESIDENT'S REQUIREMENTS DURING DINNER IN
NEW YORK

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) During an October 26 meeting with the Charge, the Director of the U.S.-Turkmenistan Business Council discussed the Turkmen President's "peculiar" requests at a dinner in his honor in September. The Business Council Director noted that he had rented a well-known New York restaurant for the event. Business Council member-companies were looking forward to an opportunity to get the ear of the Turkmen President while he was in the United States for the UN General Assembly. The Business Council director then described the mandatory changes to the event that were demanded by the head of the Turkmen Chamber of Commerce Pavlan Taganov.

¶2. (C) According to the Business Council rep, Taganov arrived at the restaurant a few hours before the scheduled dinner and announced, "The set up is all wrong and it has to be changed." Taganov reportedly insisted that the dark drapes in the restaurant be pulled back or replaced with white drapes and that all of the dark table cloths and dark flowers in the room be replaced with white ones as well. Next, Taganov demanded that four, white vases (4 feet tall each) be filled with white roses--two of the vases and white curtains would be placed behind the President's seat and the two other vases near the door. The President's seat also needed to be taller than the other chairs at the table.

¶3. (C) In addition, Taganov reportedly demanded that the table where the President would sit be decked with a white table cloth, a white table runner, and white flowers. The Business Council rep told us he argued with GOTX officials for hours, when they asked that all of the bright, red exit signs be covered with white cloth; the rep refused to cover the exit signs and cited the New York Fire Code as the legal basis for refusing this request.

¶4. (C) The Business Council rep stated that the President ate chicken, steamed carrots, and berries for dinner. According

to the rep, the President did not bring his own server, but GOTX officials reportedly unsuccessfully attempted to enter the restaurant kitchen and prepare the President's meal.

15. (C) COMMENT. In the autocratic state of Turkmenistan, the President's wishes have to be met, and woe to the unlucky official that fails to deliver. Hence Taganov's insistence on very specific decor. Still, the inflexibility of the Turkmen to leave restaurant decor well enough alone illustrates a prevalent attitude here, that others, whether a restaurant, oil company, or foreign country, should conform to Turkmen standards in dealing with the Turkmen. END

COMMENT.

CURRAN